

## 3.17.2024 Sermon

# God Intervenes | Hebrews 11:17-19

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Abraham, god, sacrifice, Isaac, texts, today, son, righteousness, faith, intervenes, life, place, Hebrews, mountain, people, culture, hear, happened, burnt offering, read

### Speaker

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So, I am really glad to be here with you today. And those of you who are watching online, thank you for joining in.

Thank you for that beautiful worship and that really beautiful word. Just really all beautiful. And your words at the beginning, Pastor James, thank you. Appreciate it.

This place is very special. You know, there are few places I go where I feel as comfortable as I do with my partner over there, Ally. Don't look at her now; that'll make her embarrassed. But that is such a gift.

I just wanted to say thanks to Cornerstone, thanks to you all, for making that possible.

So, I did want to say something really quick. Some of you don't know, some of you do know, but we moved. And some people didn't know. So, I just wanted to say it, you know, we moved. But we're still here.

That's important, because it can be confusing, especially since I'm an elder. So, to not see me, to hear that. But I wanted you to know we did move to be closer to family. And that's been a gift. But we also love this family. It's really important to us. So, even though you might see us less, we're still here, still involved, love this community, and this is our church.

I just wanted to say that to you all and express my gratitude for being here today. Amen.

So, Knock knock. Irish I wish you a very Happy St. Patrick's Day. You know, all this talk about how great Cornerstone is just reminds me of a four-leaf clover: hard to find and lucky to have. Right?

Anyway, who knows what will happen when I don't wear black? So, that was funny, guys. That was really, you guys really laugh like that? That's so weird that you laugh that hard. It's because you all harass me when I wear black. I'm just kidding.

Anyway, let's get serious because today's talk is really serious.

And, you know, have you ever heard a Christian say something, and you're like, that is bananas? Have you ever read a passage in the Bible and thought, if that's who God is, I don't really want any part of that? Have you?

Well, I have too. And today, I just want to say, Pastor Tracy's not here today. But I want to thank her for giving me the passage about child sacrifice. So, you know, Godspeed.

But I think what we're all discovering in these texts is that they are really tricky. But it's really important to tackle the tricky texts. Because I think what, what I used to do, and what I think people do, is they're like, Well, the Bible says that, and that's messed up, and I want nothing to do with that God. Or the Bible says that, and I'm just going to ignore it and pay attention to the good parts, right?

So, I think it's really, it's really important that we actually talk about some of these texts that kind of make you go like, What the heck was going on here? This is really weird. And is this who God is? And if this is who God is, it kind of makes me question like, you know, is this the kind of relationship I want to be in?

So, I love that we're willing to kind of go after these things and say, Hey, like, what's really going on here? And let's discover. And just something also to note is that when I read this passage, I had more questions than answers. So, if you would ask me, Hey, what is the passage about? Abraham 22, Genesis 22, and Hebrews 11:17 through 19. These all talk about the story where Abraham feels that God has asked him to sacrifice a son and to kill him and give him as an offering.

And so, if somebody was going to come up to me and be like, Hey, so what do you think about this? My first answer sometimes would be like, I really honestly don't know what's going on here, and I think it's important for us, you know, is those, like, if you call yourself a spiritual Christian, it's important to be able to look at people sometimes when they ask you hard questions about your faith and about the Bible, sometimes just be like, I honestly have no idea.

Because we don't have all the answers, and we're not supposed to, and that's okay. And sometimes it's a better look to not know, than think you know, and say something real direct and, and like that, which just kind of like, turn somebody right off. And, and like, I just think sometimes it's better just to be like, you know, what, I really don't know. But I'm figuring it out, I don't know.

So, we're just going to discover together.

So, I'm gonna read our texts for today. Hebrews, there are two texts that kind of explain it, Hebrews 11:17 through 19. And we're going through the hall of faiths or the Hall of Fame of people who had a lot of faith. And the writer is trying to encourage the people who are going through a lot of difficulty in the new church. And so, he's trying to say, hey, let's look back at people who had a lot of faith who went through a lot of things, and be encouraged for what we're going through.

So, Hebrews 11:17 through 19 says this, by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. He considered that God was able to even raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. So, this is referring to Genesis 22, which it's a little long, but I felt like it was important to read it.

So, we had the context. If you'd like you can follow along in your own Bibles or apps. Genesis 22: Sometime later, God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham." "Here I am," Abraham replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on the mountain that I will show you."

Early the next morning, Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back."

That's important to note those two weeks. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. And as the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" He said, "Yes, my son?" "The fire and the wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" He's starting to catch on like what's going on here, pops.

Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told them about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. Okay, we're getting like it's getting serious. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, saying, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am." The angel said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham looked up and there in the thicket, he saw a ram caught by its horns. And he went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So, Abraham called the place "The Lord will provide." And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided." The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself," declares the Lord, "that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

And if you haven't heard that for the first time, we are offering support after this. It's a serious story. I mean, it's a really big story that actually, like, a lot of our faith is built on this story. Abraham is known as the father of our faith. And Abraham was often known for his unwavering faith. But he was also known for doing things that didn't necessarily make sense in the moment to prove to God and to make God's will be done.

So, here's my question. Did Abraham really hear God say, "Kill your son"? I mean, have you ever asked that question? It's okay if you have. Did he actually hear God say that? Did God actually say that? I don't know. I'm not trying to like, discredit the Bible. But I think there's more going on here. And I think it's important to say that anytime you hear a preacher preach, we all preach from a place of our own perspective and opinion. None of us know everything. But some of us know a little, some little things. So, I'm giving you the little that I know.

Okay, you also have to form your understanding of the text. Not one of us is right, not one of us is wrong. But we do this together.

So, have you ever thought that you heard God say something, and later realized that you heard it through your own lens of what you thought was going on, or what you needed to hear?

Has that ever happened to you? Okay, so sometimes it turns out for the better, right, and sometimes it's like, ooh.

So here are some important things to know about what's going on in the context of Abraham's journey. So, during that time, the cultural norm was that you sacrificed children. That was a big part of what people did in order to prove their devout righteousness to a god called Malek. And if you did this, if you gave up your firstborn son, then you earned this level of righteousness, of goodness. Have you did it, you made it.

And in so many ways, a lot of us look for that validation, you finally are good enough, you finally did enough, right? Things to be loved, to be approved of, to be saved, to be cared for. So, in some ways, I wonder if Abraham maybe heard God say, "Go to the mountain." And in his cultural norm, the thing that would have earned him the most righteousness was to sacrifice his firstborn son.

So maybe he heard an uttering or a whisper, as much as we can hear God. And he was like, okay, like, I'm going, this is what I'm supposed to do. And I'm going to give you everything, and I'm going to sacrifice my firstborn son. So, a lot of scholars say that this text is all about the greatness of Abraham's obedience. And for me, if you really didn't hear that, I'm not going to Abraham, like, you need help.

To me, it's not inspiring. To me, I think it's sick. That's just my opinion. But what could be highlighted here is his efforts to hear and what also could be highlighted is God's intervention. Because sometimes we hear and we do, and we try the best we can. And I think the beauty of this story is that God comes in is like, "Yeah, I know, you thought this is what I meant. But here's what I actually mean." And I'm going to help you because you think that what I want is a great sacrifice, that your culture and your time would honor but what I actually want is your heart. Is your willingness, is connection with you.

So, I wonder if that's what was going on. I wonder if the testimony to the Hebrews is, yes, Abraham listened to what he thought he heard. But what he got was a divine intervention at just the right time to save the son, that would be the line of all lines. And maybe at that time, the Hebrews also needed that divine intervention, to say, "Hey, you're going through a lot, you've got a lot of promise on your life. And I'm going to intervene and help you at just the right time."

So, here's the other cool thing. Regardless of what you may think happened here, you may have a totally different opinion. That's okay. I might have one tomorrow, a different one. But the reality is something else beautiful happened. They believe historically, or geographically, that

the mountain that Abraham felt called to go to, to sacrifice, was the same mountain that Jesus ended up being crucified on: Mount Moriah, Golgotha.

That parallel, right? And I wonder, is he getting a glimpse of what's to come? Saying that no more is there going to be animal sacrifices or human sacrifices, but he's giving him a glimpse and saying, "You think that you have to do this. But in reality, I'm meeting you to show you that one day, I'm going to do this. And I'm not only going to just do it for some, I'm going to do it for all, and it's going to be my choice, it's not going to be me asking somebody else, it's going to be me saying, 'I lay down my life for you on the cross, and I will lift it back up again for you.' And it's the same place."

Like this great act of adoration that Abraham has, thinking, "I have to do this, I have to prove my love. I have to show God." And God's like, "I have to show you. And I will do it for you." And I wonder, you know, Abraham is the hero of the faith in this week's text. He made a lot of weird choices. Like, like literally like he, you know, he put somebody to sleep with his wife so that he could have a son, you know, I mean, he was doing all kinds of kooky stuff. Non-peak, not PG.

So, I wonder if Abraham can be a hero of the faith, and not have it all together? Can we also, because the hero of the faith, what it's based off of is not off of Abraham. It's based off of the witness of God to Abraham, that Abraham's story was chronicled to show how great God was to Abraham. And it's the same for us. When I look at you guys, and I look at myself, like we have messy lives, like we think we hear, we try, we do, we try and, you know, be whatever we're supposed to be. And then like, you know, we mess up, right? We're human.

And the beauty of that parallel of the mountain is that God's like, "I got this." And Jesus, so many times when Jesus was on earth in the flesh, something that he often said was, "You think, the Kingdom, you think that it's this way, but I'm telling you, it's this way." And I think that's what happened to Abraham. "You think that I want you to do all this, but really, I want you to see me and who I am for you, and what I can do for you."

And I also think that something bigger and cultural, and some disagree and some agree, which is like everything in life. So, but I also think that this was God's way of putting an end to child sacrifice. And saying like, "This is not the way of righteousness. This is not my heart." Because I always feel like God is doing a lot of things in one thing.

So, did God really say those words to Abraham? I don't know. Did God say some sort of variation of them to him? I don't know. When Abraham came down off the mountain with his son, did the culture look at him and be like, "You wimp, you couldn't do it?" Did it? Did that test him as well? Did he have to face the culture? And did they basically look at him and be like,

"You're so not righteous?" And did he have to, in that moment, rely on the righteousness that God only could give him because the culture wasn't gonna give it to him?

You know, there are certain sects of Christianity that want righteousness and goodness and want you to look like a Christian by looking a certain way. Now, I'll tell you what, I wouldn't pass in a lot of those circles, right? But that's not my problem. Because I don't get my righteousness from those people. I don't get my righteousness from the culture. I don't get my goodness, my love, my value from other Christians, from churches, from cultural norms. I get my goodness, my value, my faith from a living god because from anywhere else, it just crumbles. You know, because one day somebody says, "Oh, you're so great. You're so this. You're so righteous." The next day, they think you're a piece of trash, and they'll tear you down.

And so, thank you, because I didn't read this at all. I just spoke. Amen. No, I'm not done. I'm not done. So for me, I think God intervened. And I think God intervenes for us. And you know, Joni said, "I don't think my set matches today with your sermon." And I was listening to it. I thought, man, every single one of these songs is a bullseye. Because you know why? Because they were about the being presence of God, and not the doing.

It was lean back into what I've done, lean back into My rest. And I think that's the encouragement. Because maybe this is the mercy of God for Abraham's life. And maybe it's the mercy for our lives, that when we try to do the religious right thing. God steps in says, "It's not the sacrifices that I want, but it's your heart." That's from Psalm 30. "Something you keep giving me sacrifices, but it's your heart that I want." And don't get me wrong, you know, sometimes we sacrifice. Sometimes we, we have to lay stuff down, say, "Okay, God, I want to follow you. I'm letting this behind." So, I'm not saying that it's no sacrifice, okay? Don't hear that. But there's a nuance of being with and doing the work together with God.

But we can rest, knowing that our value and our worth, and our faith comes from Christ. So, Richard Rohr says this. He says, "The sacrificial instinct still remains ingrained, until you can fully accept that you are accepted wholeheartedly. Today's civilized cultures have evolved into various forms of self-sacrifice and moral heroics, still found in most people and groups who do not emphasize the inner experience. It's almost impossible for humans to believe that we could be good or worthy without some kind of payment to earn that dignity. The free flow of unearned love that we call grace is almost a punishment for most people, because they fiercely resist it. And they must they feel a need to prove something."

But there's a better way, and I'm so glad there is. So, maybe today, God's intervening in your life. Maybe somebody has spoken something to you and said, "God told me," and it was GARBAGE. And it really ruined your experience of Christ or Christianity. That happens from



time to time. "God told me, 'You're this.' God told me, 'You're that.'" Right? And that lives that can really move. So maybe today, you need some sort of intervention of God saying, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Don't. Don't do that. There's more."

Maybe we also get to have the rest of God, that we can put our weapons down against each other and against ourselves. And rest in what Jesus has done for us. Rest in God's power, in God's strength, and not in our own. As Paul says, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect."

And so, I wonder if this hall of fame is sure about people who about the people and what they faced? But did they help us understand more of God's care and nature towards us, when we're trying our best to live out this life of faith? To encourage our faith when we doubt when we're fatigued when we make weird decisions, when we hear things that aren't necessarily exactly God? And we try and do it the religious way, but we missed the heart of God.

And God intervenes for us today to and says, "No, no, no. It doesn't have to be that way. But it's like this instead." So, may we all be encouraged today, that God is with us, intervening in our worlds, at just the right time. And if not, in this world fully, I do believe fully we'll see the whole picture in the next world.

So, until then, may we to put down our weapons, our swords of how we think to be righteous in this world. And may we rest and trust in the love of God, and be the light of God today to show our faith not with swords, but with love. Amen.